

3/parts

METHOD OF OPTICAL CHARACTERISATION OF MATERIALS WITHOUT
USING A PHYSICAL MODEL

DESCRIPTION

5 TECHNICAL FIELD

The invention relates to a method of optical characterisation of materials.

This method allows to characterise thin or thick layers of these materials, which are created on
10 substrates. The physical dimensions, that this method allows to determine, are:

- the thickness of a layer of material;
- the refraction index of this material; and
- the absorption coefficient of this material.

15

Optical characterisation of materials is used for the chemical analysis of these materials (notably the study of absorption bands, of densification properties and of oxidation properties), in the fields of
20 microelectronics, sensors, biology, medicine, or to analyse the thickness of deposits of these materials.

We refer to document [1] for examples of applications which, as for the other documents cited later on, is mentioned at the end of this description.

25 The characterisation of the optical properties of a material is also useful when the material is structured later on (to create for example etchings or surface roughness) and the optical diffraction properties of the obtained structure must be calculated
30 (see document [2]).

It can already be noted that the invention is particularly useful when the physical law applied by the complex refraction index of the material to be characterised is, a priori, unknown.

5

STATE OF THE PRIOR ART

Remember that the optical measurements can have a variety of natures.

It can be reflectometric measurements. In this
10 case, the intensity reflection coefficient of a structure is measured over a spectrum (i.e. an interval) of wavelengths $[\lambda_m, \lambda_M]$.

The incident angle of the illuminating light may be not zero. The reflection coefficient can be measured
15 for several incidence angles θ . Let $R(\theta, \lambda, p)$ be the reflectometric spectrum, where p is the polarisation of the incident beam and λ the wavelength of the latter.

Generally, the angle θ is zero and the polarisation p unknown. In the event where θ is not
20 zero, this polarisation p must be known. Generally, the latter is of (S) or (P) type.

It can also be ellipsometric measurements. The measured dimensions are then the real and imaginary parts of the ratio between the polarisation reflection
25 coefficient (P) and the polarisation reflection coefficient (S).

We generally mark $\rho = |\rho| \exp(j\Delta)$ this complex ratio (with $j^2 = -1$). The dimensions commonly handled are $|\rho|$, that we mark $\tan(\Psi)$, and $\cos(\Delta)$, or combinations of
30 both.

For example, the variables derived from a phase modulation ellipsometer are the following:

$$I_s = \sin(2\Psi)\sin(\Delta) \text{ and } I_c = \cos(2\Psi).$$

As for a standard ellipsometer, it supplies the
5 following variables:

$$\alpha = (\tan^2\Psi - 1) / (\tan^2\Psi + 1) \text{ and } \beta = \cos\Delta(1 - \alpha^2)^{1/2}.$$

For generality purposes, we mark the handled dimensions S_1 and S_2 .

The spectrums S_i , $i \in [1, 2]$, are measured over a
10 range of wavelengths $[\lambda_m, \lambda_M]$. The incidence angle can be of any value. Several spectrums can be measured at different incidence angles in order to obtain a fuller spectrum. We mark the ellipsometric spectrum $s(\theta, \lambda) = \{S_1(\theta, \lambda), S_2(\theta, \lambda)\}$.

15 Additionally, goniometric measurements (reflection coefficient as a function of the incident angle) can be added to the measurement used for characterisation, so as to determine the thickness of the various layers, for one or several wavelengths. These measurements
20 alone are insufficient as we want to determine the complex refractive index over a spectral range from λ_m to λ_M .

So as to simplify the presentation, we mark Ψ a set of reflectometric and/or ellipsometric spectrums
25 (and possibly goniometric spectrums for a few wavelengths).

Without omitting any generality, we describe, in this description, the operating mode of the methods of the prior art and of the invention only for the case of
30 a single thin layer of material, created on a known substrate.

The thickness of this layer is marked ε and the complex refraction index of the material with the wavelength λ is marked $n^*(\lambda)$.

In this regard, remember that the real
5 (respectively imaginary) part of this complex refraction index is marked $n(\lambda)$ (respectively $k(\lambda)$) and called "refraction index" (respectively extinction coefficient).

Additionally, we mark an error function
10 $Er(\Psi^{(1)}, \Psi^{(2)})$ - for example the average quadratic gap - between two spectrums $\Psi^{(1)}$ and $\Psi^{(2)}$.

For example, we can take, when there are ellipsometric spectrums over several angles θ_i , $i \in \{1..n\}$, and a reflectometric spectrum:

15 $Er(\Psi^{(1)}, \Psi^{(2)}) =$

$$\frac{1}{\lambda_M - \lambda_m} \int_{\lambda_m}^{\lambda_M} \left[\frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \left[S_1^{(1)}(\theta_i, \lambda) - S_1^{(2)}(\theta_i, \lambda) \right]^2 + \left[S_2^{(1)}(\theta_i, \lambda) - S_2^{(2)}(\theta_i, \lambda) \right]^2 \right] + \left[R^{(1)}(\lambda) - R^{(2)}(\lambda) \right]^2 d\lambda \quad (1)$$

with $\Psi^{(1)}(\lambda) = \{S_1^{(1)}(\theta_i, \lambda), S_2^{(1)}(\theta_i, \lambda), R^{(1)}(\lambda)\}$
20 $\Psi^{(2)}(\lambda) = \{S_1^{(2)}(\theta_i, \lambda), S_2^{(2)}(\theta_i, \lambda), R^{(2)}(\lambda)\}$
and $i \in \{1..n\}$

Weighing factors can be introduced into the integral so that the error function can take into account the variations in the accuracy of the
25 measurements of the spectrums.

The optical characterisation of layers of material is generally based around two applications.

The first application is the dimension control of the deposit of thin layers that are used in microelectronics.

Usually we know the deposited material, i.e. we know the complex refraction index of this material at the first wavelengths used for the characterisation.

The laws applied by the complex refraction index are either tabulated or approximated by known physical laws such as, for example, the Cauchy model, the Sellmeier model (see document [3]), the Forouhi laws (see document [4]), and the harmonic oscillator laws (see document [5]). These laws are defined by a finite number of parameters.

For example, a Cauchy type law without absorption, with two parameters, is defined in the following manner:

$$\operatorname{Re}[n^*(\lambda)] = n(\lambda) = a_0 + \frac{a_1}{\lambda^2}$$

$$\operatorname{Im}[n^*(\lambda)] = k(\lambda) = 0$$

When we are certain of the value of the coefficients $a_i (i \in \{0, 1\})$ but we do not know the thickness, a search algorithm is used in order to find the thickness which minimises the error between the measurement Ψ and the theoretical result $\bar{\Psi}$ taking into consideration the modelled index.

The search algorithm can be, for example, the Simplex method, the Tabou search, the Levenberg-Marquart method or the simulated annealing method (see chapter 10 in document [6]).

When the refraction index is approximate, the coefficients a_i are integrated into the adjustment

process of Ψ and $\bar{\Psi}$. The search for the coefficients a_i constitutes a method of characterising the refraction index.

However, when the law applied by this refraction
 5 index is unknown (it happens that the material is unknown or that it is poorly described by known physical laws), this method remains approximate and the thickness risks being erroneous.

The second application is the characterisation of
 10 materials.

The employed method remains unchanged, except that the material is not really known. It is precisely the complex refraction index function that is the closest to reality that is targeted.

15 The type of law can be chosen via analogy with other materials. However, the law applied by the complex refraction index can be complicated, which is for example the case of a harmonic oscillator law.

$$20 \quad [n(E) + jk(E)]^2 = 1 + \sum_{i=1}^n \frac{A_i}{E + E_i + j\Gamma_i} - \frac{A_i}{E - E_i + j\Gamma_i}$$

In the above expression, $j^2 = -1$ and the refraction index and the extinction coefficient are expressed as a function of E and not of λ , with $E = 1240/\lambda$ (λ in nm).

25 In this case, the coefficients of the oscillators are difficult to find if we do not know their value range. The search is difficult to automate, as the search algorithms can give erroneous results and the time wasted can be substantial.

There is an alternative to the search for coefficients: the point to point method (PAP). This PAP method proposes not to choose a physical law and to search the complex refraction index of the material for
5 each wavelength λ_i , where $i \in [1...n]$, with $\lambda_1 = \lambda_m$ and $\lambda_n = \lambda_M$.

For each λ_i , a search algorithm tries to find the thickness, the index $n(\lambda_i)$ and the extinction coefficient $k(\lambda_i)$ which minimise the error between the
10 measured values $\Psi(\lambda_i)$ and the theoretical result $\bar{\Psi}(\lambda_i, n(\lambda_i), k(\lambda_i), \varepsilon)$.

Such a method poses a problem because the different points $(\lambda_i, \varepsilon, n(\lambda_i), k(\lambda_i))$ are not necessarily physically compatible among themselves: for example,
15 the found thickness can vary depending on the wavelength and the law applied by the complex refraction index, more simply called the index law, can have discontinuities.

This method is usually only valid when the
20 thickness is fully known and that the measurements are of good quality.

PRESENTATION OF THE INVENTION

25 The purpose of the invention is to resolve the previous inconveniences.

The method which is the object of the invention allows to characterise a material without using a physical model, i.e. without using a physical law
30 applied by the complex refraction index of the material under scrutiny. It is therefore especially useful when such a law is unknown.

This method constitutes an alternative to the
aforementioned known methods of characterisation. It
can be called "method of nodes" as it uses "nodes",
i.e. points having coordinates (λ_i, n_i^*) , where n_i^* is
5 the value taken by the complex refraction index with
the wavelength λ_i and i takes a limited number of
values (whole numbers).

Precisely, the purpose of the invention is a
method for optical characterisation of at least one
10 layer of material in an interval A of values taken by a
function α of an optical wavelength λ , when λ varies in
an interval of wavelengths, this layer being created on
a substrate, this method being characterised in that it
comprises the following stages:

15 1) we carry out a group of reflectometry and/or
ellipsometry measurements over the interval A, this set
of measurements leading to a measured spectrum, marked
 Ψ , and we choose the methods for calculating associated
with the nature of the measurements and with the type
20 of layer to be characterised;

2) we choose m initial values $\alpha_1 \dots \alpha_m$ of the
function α , belonging to this interval A, m being a
whole number at least equal to 1, and we define an
interval B as being the set of points α of the interval
25 ranging from the smallest to the biggest number among
 $\alpha_1 \dots \alpha_m$, when m is greater than 1, and as being the
interval A when m equals 1;

3) we choose m complex initial values of a complex
refraction index $n^* = n + jk$ for the m points α_i , i ranging
30 from 1 to m ;

4) when m is not 1, we choose an interpolation law which allows to calculate the refraction index $n(\alpha)$ of the material over the interval B , from the points (α_i, n_i) , with $n_i = n(\alpha_i)$, i ranging from 1 to m , and when m equals 1, $n(\alpha)$ is taken equal to the number $n_1(\alpha_1)$ over the entire interval B ;

5) we choose M variable parameters, M being less than or equal to $2m+1$;

6) we choose an error function $Er(\Psi, \bar{\Psi})$ which characterises the difference between a measured spectrum Ψ and a theoretical spectrum $\bar{\Psi}$;

7) using a minimising function of $Er(\Psi, \bar{\Psi})$ with M parameters, we perform the following series of stages:

a) by applying the interpolation law of (α_i, n_i) over the interval B , we deduce $n(\alpha)$, α belonging to B ;

b) by using $n(\alpha)$ and the thickness ε of the layer, and methods for calculating spectrums, we calculate a theoretical spectrum $\bar{\Psi}(n(\alpha), \varepsilon)$;

c) we compare Ψ and $\bar{\Psi}$ by using $Er(\Psi, \bar{\Psi})$ and, if $Er(\Psi, \bar{\Psi})$ is sufficiently small, i.e. less than a predetermined value \underline{e} , or is minimal, we go to stage e), otherwise we go to stage d);

d) we make the M variable parameters vary so as to tend to the minimum of $Er(\Psi, \bar{\Psi})$, and we return to stage a);

e) if $Er(\Psi, \bar{\Psi})$ is less than \underline{e} , we then obtain a set of M variable parameters, for which $Er(\Psi, \bar{\Psi}(n(\alpha, M), \varepsilon))$ is minimal and the refraction index is then taken equal to the last one obtained, and

if $E_r(\Psi, \bar{\Psi})$ is greater or equal to \underline{e} we go to stage 8).

8) we increase the number m of initial values of the function α and we return to stage 2).

5 It is therefore, for example, possible to perform optical characterisation:

- over an interval of wavelengths λ , in this case the interval $[\lambda_{\min}, \lambda_{\max}]$,

- or over an interval of inverse wavelengths $1/\lambda$, in this case over an interval $[(1/\lambda)_{\min}, (1/\lambda)_{\max}]$, where $(1/\lambda)_{\min}$ is equal to $1/(\lambda_{\max})$ and $(1/\lambda)_{\max}$ is equal to $1/(\lambda_{\min})$;

- or over an interval of energies E (with $E = hv = hc/\lambda$ where h is the Planck's constant, c the speed of the light in the vacuum and v the frequency corresponding to (λ) , in this case over an interval $[E_{\min}, E_{\max}]$, where E_{\min} is equal to $hc/(\lambda_{\max})$ and E_{\max} is equal to $hc/(\lambda_{\min})$;

- or, more generally, over an interval $[\alpha_{\min}, \alpha_{\max}]$ of values taken by a function α of the variable λ .

Furthermore, it is appropriate to note that the invention can be used to characterise a spectrum or a part of a spectrum.

25 Each interpolation law can be chosen from among the linear interpolation laws, the cubic interpolation laws, the polynomial interpolation laws and the interpolation laws for example of "spline" function type.

30 According to a preferred embodiment of the method which is the object of the invention, the spectrum is

evenly sampled in $\alpha(\lambda)$, meaning that the initial values of the function α (see the aforementioned stage 2) are evenly distributed over the interval A, the distribution of the nodes thus being homogenous.

5 As previously seen, $\alpha(\lambda)$ can be chosen from among λ , $1/\lambda$ and hc/λ or any other function of λ , where h is the Plank's constant and c is the speed of the light in the vacuum.

10 Preferably, in the aforementioned stage 6), we measure the error over an interest interval C which is included in the interval B or equal to this interval B.

The M variable parameters can be the real parts of the refraction indexes at points α_i , i ranging from 1 to m , or the imaginary parts of these refraction
15 indexes, or these M variable parameters can be constituted by the thickness of the material for which we are searching the refraction index.

Another purpose of the invention is another method for optical characterisation of at least one layer of a
20 material in an interval of wavelengths $[\lambda_{\min}, \lambda_{\max}]$, this layer being created on a substrate, this other method being characterised in that:

- we carry out a set of reflectometry and/or ellipsometry measurements, this set of measurements
25 leading to a measured spectrum, marked Ψ ;

- we choose m initial wavelengths $\lambda_1 \dots \lambda_m$ belonging to this interval, m being a whole number at least equal to 1, we associate a refraction index to each wavelength;

- we choose an interpolation law at least for the refraction index of the material, for wavelengths lying between the initial wavelengths $\lambda_1 \dots \lambda_m$;
- we choose M initial parameters, M being at least equal to m, namely an initial refraction index n_i for each initial wavelength λ_i , $1 \leq i \leq m$, the initial wavelengths being chosen so as to determine via interpolation at least the refraction index for any wavelength within the interval $[\lambda_{\min}, \lambda_{\max}]$, the couples (λ_i, n_i) being called nodes;
- we choose reflectometry and ellipsometry methods of calculation;
- we also choose an error function Er , representative of the difference between two spectrums Ψ_1 and Ψ_2 , the spectrums Ψ_1 and Ψ_2 being calculated or measured over a number of points greater than the number m of nodes;
- using the m initial wavelengths, the M initial parameters and the interpolation law, we implement the following optimisation process:
- we determine a theoretical spectrum, marked $\bar{\Psi}$, depending on the chosen methods of calculation, and on the index deduced via interpolation of its value at λ_i , i ranging from 1 to m, over the spectrum $[\lambda_{\min}, \lambda_{\max}]$;
- we determine the error $Er(\Psi, \bar{\Psi})$, between the measured spectrum and the theoretical spectrum;
- we minimise this error by varying the position of the values of the unknown indexes and/or the thickness of the layer and/or the values of the

refraction indexes with initial wavelengths, and we obtain a spectrum;

- we add other wavelengths to the initial wavelengths $\lambda_1 \dots \lambda_m$, the added wavelengths constituting
5 new nodes;

- we repeat the method by choosing a number m' of initial wavelengths, m' being greater than m , and M' initial parameters, M' being greater than M , until the accuracy of each spectrum thus best represented is
10 equal to a predetermined accuracy.

In this case, according to a first specific embodiment, m is at least equal to 2; according to a second specific embodiment, m is equal to 1 and we choose equal initial refraction indexes.

15 Also in this case, according to a specific embodiment, the material is non absorbent and the number M is equal to m , the extinction coefficient of the material being set equal to 0; according to another specific embodiment, M is at least equal to $2m$, we
20 furthermore choose an interpolation law for the extinction coefficient of the material, for each initial wavelength λ_i , $1 \leq i \leq m$, furthermore we choose an initial extinction coefficient k_i , the initial wavelengths furthermore being chosen so as to be able
25 to determine via interpolation the extinction coefficient for any wavelength of the interval $[\lambda_{\min}, \lambda_{\max}]$, and within the optimisation process, we minimise the error by also varying the values of the extinction coefficients at the initial wavelengths and
30 the added wavelengths are furthermore placed so as to

best represent the spectrum of the extinction coefficient of the material.

In the case of this other specific embodiment, m can be equal to 1 and we can choose equal initial
5 refraction indexes and equal initial extinction coefficients.

Still in the case of this other method which is an object of the invention, the layer of material can be thin, i.e. with a thickness less than the coherence
10 length of the light used for measuring, we can choose an additional initial parameter, namely an initial layer thickness, and in the optimisation process we can minimise the error by also varying the value of the layer thickness; in an alternative, the layer of
15 material can be thick, i.e. not thin, and M can be at most equal to $2m$; in another alternative, the thickness of the layer of material can be known with sufficient accuracy and M is at most equal to $2m$.

The distribution of the nodes can be homogenous.
20

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The invention will be better understood upon reading the description of the below embodiments, given
25 by way of non-restrictive examples, making reference to the annexed drawings among which:

- figure 1 is a diagrammatic view of devices allowing to characterise a layer according to the invention;
- 30 - figure 2 shows the variations in the refraction index as a function of the wavelength, for a material obeying to a Cauchy law (curve I) and for a

material characterised according to the invention (curve II);

- figure 3A (respectively 3B) shows the variations in the refraction index (respectively in the extinction coefficient) as a function of the wavelength, for a material obeying to a law with two harmonic oscillators (curve I) and for a material characterised according to the invention; and

- figure 4 diagrammatically illustrates the parameters used in a generalisation of examples of the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PARTICULAR EMBODIMENTS

The invention proposes an alternative to the aforementioned standard methods. It allows to combine the coherence of a layer model (corresponding to a continuous index law and to constant physical thicknesses), with the generality concerning the index law to be found (as in the PAP method). Furthermore, the resolution is only limited by the resolution of the measured spectrum.

In the method according to the invention, the spectrum of index $n^*(\lambda)$ is characterised by:

- a limited number of "nodes" which are points having co-ordinates (λ_i, n_i, k_i) or (λ_i, n_i^*) , with $n_i = n(\lambda_i)$, $k_i = k(\lambda_i)$ and $n_i^* = n_i + jk_i$, where $j^2 = -1$, and

- an interpolation law between the nodes, which can be, for example, linear, cubic, of "spline" type or polynomial (of any given degree).

This interpolation law allows to calculate, from the nodes, the refraction indexes and the extinction

coefficients for the wavelengths located between the nodes.

For example, when the refraction index is characterised by a set of value for wavelengths $\lambda_1 \dots \lambda_m$, we
 5 can use a linear interpolation between two wavelengths λ_i and λ_{i+1} to calculate the index n at the wavelength λ (see document [6] chapter 3):

$$n(\lambda) = \frac{(\lambda_{i+1} - \lambda)n(\lambda_i) + (\lambda - \lambda_i)n(\lambda_{i+1})}{\lambda_{i+1} - \lambda_i}$$

10 with $\lambda_i < \lambda < \lambda_{i+1}$

We can do the same for the extinction coefficient.

When the number of nodes makes it possible, more complex interpolation formulae, bringing into play nearby nodes, can be used (see document [6] chapter 3).

15 A layer model is therefore characterised by a thickness ε and a family of nodes.

Hereafter we present an example of the method according to the invention. In this example, the measurements Ψ are constituted of a reflectometry
 20 measurement $R(\lambda)$ and an ellipsometry measurement $S_{1,2}(\theta, \lambda)$ where θ is the incidence angle of the light beam that is transmitted onto the layer to be studied during measuring via ellipsometry.

This layer is a thin layer so that the thickness of
 25 this layer is also a variable of the problem. Moreover, we suppose that only one layer is unknown, this layer being created on a known substrate.

We will first of all briefly explain this example which uses an algorithm (algorithm of the "nodes method"
 30 according to the invention).

From assumed information about the thickness ε of the scrutinised layer and about the refraction index $n(\lambda)$ and about the extinction coefficient $k(\lambda)$ of the material of this layer, we create initial nodes (only a few) and
5 an initial thickness ε .

We thus have m nodes and, via interpolation, we can find $n(\lambda)$ and $k(\lambda)$ when λ is different from the values of the wavelengths associated with the nodes.

From the initial thickness ε and these initial
10 values $n(\lambda)$ and $k(\lambda)$, we determine the theoretical spectrum $\bar{\Psi}$ by using ellipsometric and reflectometric calculations.

Furthermore, by means of ellipsometric and reflectometric devices and a spectrometer, we obtain
15 $S_{1,2}(\theta, \lambda)$ and $R(\lambda)$ and we deduce the measurements marked Ψ (for measuring conditions θ and λ).

We then compare Ψ and $\bar{\Psi}$ by using an error function Er and we optimise the refraction index value and the extinction coefficient value at the different nodes as
20 well as the thickness value, by trying to minimise $Er(\Psi, \bar{\Psi})$.

Once these values have been optimised and if the accuracy on the spectrum $n(\lambda)$, the spectrum $k(\lambda)$ and the thickness ε is insufficient, we introduce new nodes, we
25 make the thickness ε vary and we recommence the determination of $\bar{\Psi}$, the comparison of Ψ and $\bar{\Psi}$ and the optimisation that are aforementioned, etc.

We break the thus defined loop when the accuracy on each of the spectrums $n(\lambda)$ and $k(\lambda)$ and on the thickness

ε is considered to be sufficient (satisfactory adjustment of Ψ and $\bar{\Psi}$).

The spectrums $n(\lambda)$, $k(\lambda)$ and the thickness ε are thus characterised.

5 In a non-restrictive illustration we find a layer thickness ε equal to 212.3nm.

Figure 1 diagrammatically shows the scrutinised layer 2, created on a substrate 4. We can see the ellipsometric device 5,6, the reflectometric device 8 and
10 the spectrometer 10. Furthermore, we can see electronic processing means 12, comprising a computer and allowing to characterise $n(\lambda)$, $k(\lambda)$ and ε according to the information supplied by the spectrometer 10 and according to the method of the invention.

15 These means 12 are equipped with display means 14 which allow, in particular, to display the curve of the variation of n as a function of λ and the curve of the variation of k as a function of λ .

We will now consider the illustration in greater
20 detail.

Phase 1

The method of this example firstly comprises an initialisation stage.

The algorithm starts with a limited number of nodes,
25 more precisely at least one node. We can therefore start with a single node, by imposing a refraction index and an extinction coefficient which remain constant when the wavelength varies.

We chose node positions so as to, from this node
30 family, deduce the entire spectrum via interpolation. The layer model therefore has 3 parameters or more, as the

thickness is also a variable to be determined. The index table over the entire spectrum is therefore deduced from the nodes via interpolation.

5 This is the case when the thickness of the layers is about the dimension of the wavelength (thin layers). But when the thickness of the layer is greater than the coherence length of the light source, the thickness barely enters into the calculation of the layer response, and is therefore no longer a variable of the problem.

10 For example, in the case of optical disks (CDROM), on which a very thick layer is deposited (a thickness of about 1 millimetre), the reflection coefficient of such a layer is no longer a function of the thickness of the layer but purely of the refraction index of the latter,
15 the coherence length of the incident light beam being less than the thickness of the layer. In this precise case, the coherence length of the incident beam is determined by the roughness of the layers.

We choose, for example, to place the first two nodes
20 at the ends λ_{\min} and λ_{\max} of the spectrum. The complex index values at these ends are chosen according to the type of material under scrutiny. For example, on an ellipsometric spectrum between 300nm and 800nm of a thin layer of photoresist, we take $n(300\text{nm})=n(800\text{nm})=1.5$ and
25 $k(300\text{nm})=k(800\text{nm})=0$.

When the spectrum is only characterised by two nodes, the index between the ends is determined via linear interpolation. In the case under consideration, we therefore have $n(\lambda)=1.5$ and $k(\lambda)=0$ for λ belonging to
30 $[300\text{nm}, 800\text{nm}]$.

From three nodes up, we rather opt for cubic interpolation in order to obtain softer forms of index law compared to those obtained via linear interpolation.

The initial thickness is, itself, chosen as close as possible to the real thickness.

Phase 2

We then proceed with an optimal determination of the values of the refraction index and of the extinction coefficient on the nodes and of the thickness value.

To accomplish this, the spectrums $\bar{\Psi}(\lambda)$ are calculated by means of the used layer model, resulting from the choice of nodes, the interpolation law and the thickness of the layer.

The physical model used to calculate $\bar{\Psi}$ of course depends on the applied method for measuring, i.e. in particular on the incidence angle of the light, on the applied spectrum and on the model of thin layers or of thick layers if appropriate (see for example the model of stacked layers in document 3)).

The spectrums Ψ being constituted of a set of measurements of diverse nature (for example ellipsometric and reflectometric measurements), we use a reflectometric (respectively ellipsometric) calculation method for reflectometric (respectively ellipsometric) measurements.

The reflectometric and ellipsometric measurements are combined by means of an error function $Er(\Psi, \bar{\Psi})$ which is for example of the type defined by the equation (1).

Thanks to a search function, we minimise the difference between $\bar{\Psi}(\lambda)$ and $\Psi(\lambda)$, by varying the value of the refraction index and the value of the extinction

coefficient at the position of each of the nodes as well as the layer thickness (if this thickness is an important factor in the calculation of $\bar{\Psi}$). When the difference is minimal, that being when $Er(\Psi, \bar{\Psi})$ is minimal, this signifies that the reflectometric and ellipsometric measurements coincide to their best (for a given number of nodes).

At this stage we obtain, for a known number of nodes and a known spectral position for each of these nodes, the layer model (refraction index, extinction coefficient and thickness) which best corresponds to the real layer.

The validity of the found model is better ensured as the number of measurements increases. To obtain a large number of measurements we can for example use several incidence angles of the light θ_i , $1 \leq i \leq l$, for the ellipsometric spectrums, carry out a reflectometric measurement and complementary goniometric measurements.

Phase 3

Then, we increase the number of nodes.

We add a finite number of nodes. In a first embodiment, the added nodes are positioned so as to best represent the spectrums $n(\lambda)$ and $k(\lambda)$. By way of example, we place these additional nodes at spots where the difference between Ψ and $\bar{\Psi}$ is maximum or at spots where the nodes are the furthest apart. We then return to phase 2 as long as the accuracy on each of the spectrums $n(\lambda)$ and $k(\lambda)$ and on the thickness ε is insufficient, i.e. not equal to a predetermined accuracy.

In a second embodiment, we insert new nodes between two nodes of the set of previously chosen nodes, these new nodes being evenly distributed over the spectrum.

All the same it is appropriate to heed the following.

When we increase the number of nodes, the position of the old nodes does not need to be conserved. For
5 example, assume that we evenly sample a spectrum from 400nm to 800nm with 3 nodes. These nodes are therefore respectively located at 400nm, 600nm and 800nm. When we increase to 6 nodes, the three additional nodes cannot be placed so that the spectrum is evenly sampled if we
10 conserve the position of the old nodes. The position of the 6 nodes can be defined, if we wish to have even sampling, by the values 400, 480, 560, 640, 720 and 800nm. The old middle node at 600nm therefore disappears. To calculate the index value at these positions from the
15 old nodes we use interpolation.

In the following we provide two common examples of application of the invention. These examples implement two types of materials which apply different laws.

From ellipsometric and reflectometric measurements
20 we propose to find the physical laws applied by these materials.

We proceed in the following manner.

A fictitious material is created, this material applying a known theoretical law (a Cauchy law or a
25 harmonic oscillator law), with parameters that we arbitrarily set. The variations of the complex refraction index as a function of the wavelength are thus perfectly known.

Furthermore, we impose a thickness of 200.00nm for
30 the material, on a silicon substrate, this latter also being well known.

Fictitious measurements (ellipsometric measurements, reflectometric measurements) are calculated, then noise induced so as to introduce an apparatus defect.

It all takes place as if we had used real
5 measurements taken on the material. But contrary to reality we fully know the complex refraction index as we set it just as we set the thickness of the layer of material.

Here we "blindly" test the method, that meaning we
10 start with an erroneous thickness (220nm) and false complex refraction indexes, as they are supposed to be unknown.

We apply the method according to the invention then we compare the complex refraction index found with the
15 theoretical complex refraction index. We precisely find the same laws, as well as the same layer thickness.

As a first example, take a material whose complex refraction index applies to a Cauchy law such as:

$$n(\lambda) = 1.5 + 0.1 \frac{300^2}{\lambda^2} + 0.1 \frac{300^4}{\lambda^4}$$

20 $k(\lambda) = 0$

This index law is typical of photoresists (in the spectral range from 300nm to 800nm).

In order to find, using the nodes method (i.e. the method according to the invention), the aforementioned
25 index law, we carry out two measurements, namely an ellipsometric measurement at a 70° angle and a reflectometric measurement.

The processing conditions are as follows:

- the processed spectrum lies between 300nm and
30 800nm;

- at the start, the nodes are in the positions (300nm, 1.6) and (800nm, 1.6), this meaning that the index is considered as linearly varying between 300nm and 800nm, and that its value is constant (equal to 1.6);

5 - the number of nodes is repeatedly increased
according to the sequence 2→4→6;

- during the node increasing procedure, the wavelength position of each node is calculated so that the sampling by $1/\lambda$ is regular (λ : wavelength), the density of points thus being increased around the low wavelengths;

- the interpolation law is a cubic law, when the number of nodes is greater than 2, otherwise it is linear; and

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15      -   the applied minimisation algorithm is a Simplex
      type algorithm.

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Figure 2 allows to compare the refraction index corresponding to the fictitious material which perfectly applies the Cauchy law (curve I) with the refraction index which we find via the nodes method (curve II), using 6 nodes (represented by circles in figure 2). We have used a Ψ composed of an ellipsometric measurement $\{S_1(\lambda), S_2(\lambda)\}$ at 70° and a reflectometric measurement $R(\lambda)$.

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25         We finally find a thickness of 199.8384nm.
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As for a second example, take a material whose complex refractive index applies a law with two harmonic oscillators, such as:

$$30 \quad [n(E) + jk(E)]^2 = 1 + \sum_{i=1}^2 \frac{A_i}{E + E_i + jG_i} - \frac{A_i}{E - E_i + jG_i}$$

with

$$j^2 = -1 \text{ and } E = 1240/\lambda \text{ (}\lambda \text{ in nm)}$$

$$A_1 = 0.25 \times 1.5^2 \quad A_2 = 0.25 \times 1.5^2$$

$$E_1 = 1240/400 \quad E_2 = 1240/300$$

5 $G_1 = 0.3 \quad G_2 = 0.3$

In this second example, the nodes method is applied to a set of ellipsometric measurements carried out between 250nm and 800nm, at 75°, 70°, 60° and 45°, along with a reflectometric measurement. The real thickness of
10 the material being 200nm, we find a thickness of 200.25nm with the nodes method. The adjustment to the index law considered in this second example is very good, as figures 3A and 3B demonstrate.

These figures 3A and 3B respectively illustrate the
15 reconstructions of the curves $n(\lambda)$ and $k(\lambda)$ of the material by means of the nodes method. The reconstruction is carried out using four ellipsometric spectrums and a reflectometric spectrum. The real absorption peaks are particularly well represented by the curve obtained via
20 cubic interpolation between the nodes (represented by the circles in figures 3A and 3B).

In figure 3A, the curve I (respectively II) corresponds to a refraction index n which perfectly applies the chosen law (respectively to a refraction
25 index n found via the nodes method).

In figure 3B, the curve I (respectively II) corresponds to an extinction coefficient k which perfectly applies the chosen law (respectively to an extinction coefficient k found via the nodes method).

30 Examples of the invention have just been described above. More generally speaking, we note that in the

invention we consider a set X of values, with $X = \{n_1, n_2, \dots, n_i, \dots, n_m, k_1, k_2, \dots, k_i, \dots, k_m, \varepsilon\}$, where

n_i is the value of the refraction index (real) corresponding to λ_i , $i \in \{1 \dots m\}$, m being the number of
5 nodes

k_i is the value of the absorption coefficient at the node corresponding to λ_i , $i \in \{1 \dots m\}$,

ε is the thickness of the scrutinised layer.

In this case, the operation for minimizing the error
10 $Er(\Psi, \bar{\Psi})$ means finding the set or "vector" X such that Er is minimal.

When we do not assert any specific constraints, the minimising is a minimising with $2xm+1$ parameters. We can of course introduce constraints in order to reduce the
15 number of variables.

In particular, if we know that the material is non-absorbent, we impose $k_i=0$ for all i of $\{1 \dots m\}$ and X becomes: $X = \{n_1, n_2, \dots, n_i, \dots, n_m, \varepsilon\}$.

If through a complementary measurement (for example
20 a goniometric measurement or a non-optical direct measurement) we know with sufficient accuracy the thickness of the scrutinised layer, the thickness ε is no longer a variable and we obtain:
 $X = \{n_1, n_2, \dots, n_i, \dots, n_m, k_1, k_2, \dots, k_i, \dots, k_m\}$.

25 Of course, the two previous options can be combined.

In the following we explain an embodiment of the invention in a more general form than the previous examples.

Given that $\alpha(\lambda)$ is a function of the wavelength λ
30 of the light used in the measurements, we can for example choose:

$\alpha(\lambda)=\lambda$ (see figures 3A and 3B where the spectrum is evenly sampled in λ)

$\alpha(\lambda)=1/\lambda$ (see figure 2 where the spectrum is evenly samples in $1/\lambda$)

5 $\alpha(\lambda)=hc/\lambda$ where h is the Planck's constant and c the speed of light in the vacuum, $\alpha(\lambda)$ then being homogenous with an energy.

Given that A is the interval of the spectrum of measurement, B is the spectral interval described by the
10 "nodes" and C is the interval of interest.

The interval C is included in the interval B or equal to this interval B . Likewise, the interval B is included in the interval A or equal to this interval A .

We specify that each of the intervals A , B and C is
15 of $[\alpha_m, \alpha_M]$ type where α_m is less than α_M and there are two wavelengths λ_k and λ_i such that $\alpha_m=\alpha(\lambda_k)$ and $\alpha_M=\alpha(\lambda_i)$. By way of non-restrictive illustration, figure 4 shows an example of the intervals A , B and C and of the variation curves of Ψ and $\bar{\Psi}$ as a function of $\alpha(\lambda)$, $\bar{\Psi}$ in fact being
20 a function of $n^*(\alpha(\lambda))$.

The circles N represent the nodes.

n^* is the complex index which is expressed here as a function of $\alpha(\lambda)$ and whose real and imaginary parts are respectively marked $n(\alpha(\lambda))$ and $k(\alpha(\lambda))$.

25 We also see, by way of non-restrictive example, an example of the variations curve of n (respectively k) as a function of $\alpha(\lambda)$, passing through the points having coordinates (n_i, α_i) (respectively (k_i, α_i) , where $\alpha_i=\alpha(\lambda_i)$, $n_i=n(\alpha_i)$, $k_i=k(\alpha_i)$, $1 \leq i \leq m$ (m being a natural number other
30 than zero).

In figure 4 we note the relation between the nodes N , the points (n_i, α_i) and the points (k_i, α_i) .

In the embodiment under consideration, we use an algorithm comprising the following stages:

5 1. we carry out the measurements Ψ over the interval A and we choose the calculation methods associated with the measurements (ellipsometric or reflectometric calculations);

10 2. we choose m numbers α_i (constituting m initial values of the function α), i belonging to $\{1, \dots, m\}$, with $m \geq 1$, and $\{\alpha_i\} \subset A$ (the α_i corresponding to the "nodes"); when $m > 1$, B is defined as the set of points α such that $\min(\alpha_i) \leq \alpha \leq \max(\alpha_i)$; when $m = 1$, we have $B = A$;

15 3. we choose m initial values of complex index n^* at the m points α_i , i belonging to $\{1, \dots, m\}$;

20 4. if $m \neq 1$ we choose an interpolation law which allows to calculate the refraction index $n(\alpha)$ over the interval B from the points (α_i, n_i) , i belonging to $\{1, \dots, m\}$; if $m = 1$, then $n(\alpha) = n_1(\alpha_1)$ over the entire interval B ;

5. we choose M variable parameters with $M \leq 2m + 1$; these parameters can be for example:

- the real parts of the refraction indexes at points α_i , i belonging to $\{1, \dots, m\}$, or
- 25 - the imaginary parts of the refraction indexes at these same points, or
- the thickness of the material for which we are searching the refraction index;

30 6. we choose an error function $Er(\Psi, \bar{\Psi})$ which characterises the difference between a measured spectrum

and a theoretical spectrum; generally, the error is measured over the interval C ;

7. using a minimising function of $Er(\Psi, \bar{\Psi})$ with M parameters, we perform the following series of stages:

5 a) by applying the interpolation function of (α_i, n_i) over B , we deduce $n(\alpha)$ with α belonging to B ;

b) by using $n(\alpha)$ and the thickness ε and methods for calculating spectrums, we calculate the theoretical spectrum $\bar{\Psi}(n(\alpha), \varepsilon)$;

10 c) we compare Ψ and $\bar{\Psi}$ by using $Er = Er(\Psi, \bar{\Psi})$; if Er is sufficiently small (i.e. if Er is less than a predetermined value \underline{e}), or if Er is minimal, we go to stage e), otherwise we go to stage d);

d) we make the M variable parameters vary so as to
15 tend to the minimum of Er and we return to stage a);

e) if Er is less than \underline{e} we then obtain a set of M parameters such that $Er(\Psi, \bar{\Psi}(n(\alpha, M), \varepsilon))$ is minimal and the refraction index calculation is completed: this index is taken equal to the last one obtained; and if Er is
20 greater than or equal to \underline{e} we go to stage 8).

8. We increase m and we return to stage 2).

It is appropriate to note that the invention can not only use wavelength (λ) samplings but also frequency (c/λ or simply $1/\lambda$) samplings, energy (hc/λ) samplings and,
25 more generally, samplings with parameters which are functions of the wavelength.

Furthermore, it is appropriate to note that an aforementioned essential stage of the algorithm (stage 8) is not restricted to adding a set of nodes to the already
30 existing nodes: it encompasses the more general case where the number of nodes increases. This means, in a

specific embodiment of the invention, that after minimising with 3 nodes, if we want to increase to 6 nodes in all, the position of the 3 old nodes is "erased" so as, for example, to have a constant density of nodes over the spectrum. In practice, this is the best option. The information about the position of the old nodes is not lost as the index value at the old nodes is used to calculate the values of the 6 new nodes (in fact 3 new nodes plus 3 old nodes).

Thus, according to a specific embodiment of the method according to the invention, we can increase the number of initial values of the function α by adding one or several values to the extant initial values; however, according to a preferred embodiment, we can increase the number of initial values of the function α by replacing the extant initial values with new initial values whose number is greater than the number of extant initial values.

The invention is not restricted to the characterisation of thin layers. It also applies to the characterisation of thick layers.

Furthermore, the invention is not restricted to the characterisation of a single layer, created on a substrate. It also applies to the characterisation of two, or more than two, layers created on a substrate.

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